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SENSITIVE  
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PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [CM](#)

SUBJECT: BIYA SIGNS CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT REMOVING TERM  
LIMITS

REF: A. YAOUNDE 359

[1](#)B. YAOUNDE 358 AND PRIOR

[1](#)1. (U) President Paul Biya on April 14 signed and ratified the controversial constitutional amendment passed by the National Assembly on April 11. Among other things, the bill removes presidential term limits and creates immunity for the president after he leaves office. A widely rumored opposition strike has so far not materialized, but there is a heavy presence of security forces in Douala, Yaounde, Bamenda, and on the country's major highways. The government (GRC) has ordered police and gendarmes to remain on alert and in their robust status in the coming days, most likely through National Day on May 20.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The government's harsh actions against dissenters continues. Singer/songwriter Lapiro de Mbanga, who wrote a song opposing the move to amend the constitution, was recently arrested for alleged involvement in the February riots. Social Democratic Front (SDF) Parliamentarian Jean Michel Nintheu, one of the organizers of demonstrations in February, is reportedly under military surveillance and his passport has been confiscated. SDF Chairman John Fru Ndi has called for resistance, but he lacks the ability to mobilize large numbers of people. Outspoken Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) parliamentarian Paul Abine Ayah said that he did not vote during the National Assembly's passage of the constitutional amendment but that his vote was stolen when a fellow CPDM Parliamentarian used a forged proxy to vote on his behalf. All other CPDM (ruling party) members voted for the bill; rumors abound that substantial sums of money exchanged hands in the process.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Comment: The quick signing of the constitutional revision into law comes as no surprise. The imposing security presence in the country's potential hot spots, and the still fresh memory of the quick clampdown on the February riots, probably ensures there will be no massive outcry. Rather, there is a feeling of resignation in the air. At the same time, there is a certain level of hope and expectation among our contacts, and expressed in the independent media, that the United States will now come forth with a response, given that we issued the strongest and earliest foreign government statement when the constitutional change was proposed. Biya's signing of the constitutional revision will likely turn more attention to rumors of an imminent Cabinet shuffle and of possible early elections.

NELSON